

WASHINGTON

By ROSCOE DRUMMOND

The Vital Role of C. I. A.

WASHINGTON.

If you drew up a list of the ten most influential officials in Washington, his name would probably not even occur to you.

If you looked at a chart of the Federal government and sought to trace the lines of largest authority, his agency would hardly be visible.



Roscoe Drummond

He sits in the Cabinet not by act of Congress, as do most of the other members, but by special direction of the President.

I'm referring to Allen W. Dulles. He administers the least publicized, the least understood but the most vital arm of the United States government, the Central Intelligence Agency. Whether as its director Mr. Dulles does or does not do his job well—overwhelmingly well—very likely determines, more than any other service to the President, whether we are winning or losing the cold war, whether we are or are not making the right judgments toward averting an atomic war.

The Dulles-operated C. I. A. is the intelligence instrument of the National Security Council within which the most important decisions of policy and action are made.

Mr. Dulles makes no policy decisions whatsoever—and nothing could more misleadingly measure the critical and powerful role he plays.

What it is Mr. Dulles' duty to do is to provide the basis—that is, the information, the appraisal, the intelligence estimates—on which the highest policy decisions are made.

If the C. I. A.'s intelligence is inadequate, then American policy will almost inevitably be inadequate.

If there are serious shortcomings in the C. I. A.'s operations and if there are serious blind spots in the C. I. A.'s intelligence estimates—this isn't something that is just regrettable, this is something close to fatal.

All this is why the Gen. Mark Clark task-force study and report on the C. I. A. and the related intelligence agencies of the government, undertaken for the Hoover Commission, cannot be appraised on the same basis as other critiques of other Federal operations.

What I am trying to say is that there is no good having a second-best air force.

I am not suggesting that the C. I. A. operation is second-best; I am only suggesting that just because the C. I. A. gets off relatively lightly, as such government surveys go, from the Clark investigation—indeed gets pretty high marks along with some proposals for reorganization—this is no reason why the C. I. A. or Congress or the public can sit back comfortably amid mutual congratulations.

Gen. Clark's investigation found no foundation for Sen. McCarthy's charges that the C. I. A. was infiltrated with subversives. It found no "security risks" and said the intelligence agencies were led "by a group which is sincere and dedicated

to the service of the nation." It gave this estimate of Allen Dulles: "Industrious, objective, selfless, enthusiastic and imaginative."

But the task force report and the Hoover Commission concluded that what is good can be made better and needs to be made better. They believe we can get better and fuller information from behind the Iron Curtain; they feel intelligence operations should be "bolder," less diplomatically constricted and that some internal reorganization would help to this end. They advocate a Congressional watchdog committee and suggest that a specially selected, small commission of private citizens should look over the C. I. A. operation periodically.

The C. I. A. has no occasion to be sensitive of this task-force criticism. The praise is substantial and the criticism friendly.

Allen Dulles certainly knows and we all ought to appreciate that the C. I. A. can't afford to be wrong, that it must have the best—not just almost the best—men at its disposal and that the standard for judging its operation must be not just a high "A" but perfection—or something so near to it as to be indistinguishable.

Realistically, the C. I. A. can, perhaps, afford to be wrong once, but it can't afford to be wrong for long and it can't afford to be wrong twice. It is doing a tough job and we have to be tough in judging it.

Copyright, 1955, N. Y. Herald Tribune Inc.

CPYRIGHT